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SUBJECT: PANAMA: JULIA TAFT REFUGEE FUND NOMINATION

REF: SECSTATE 14280

¶1. (U) Post is pleased to nominate local NGO Fundacion Calicanto for a 20,000 USD grant from the Julia Taft Refugee Fund for job training for refugees and persons under Temporary Humanitarian Protection (THP).

Filling A Gap

¶2. (U) A critical gap in services provided to refugees and persons under Temporary Humanitarian Protection (THP) in Panama is job training. To satisfy their basic needs and better integrate into the community, refugees need access to jobs in an increasingly competitive urban job market. THP persons, who are not legally permitted to participate in the formal labor sector and live in difficult-to-access areas, would benefit from trade skills that could fulfill local labor needs and bring skills into their communities.

¶3. (U) Post proposes that PRM award 20,000 USD from the Julia Taft Refugee Fund to assist refugees and THP persons in Panama obtain job training. We propose that these funds be awarded to Fundacion Calicanto, an established and well-respected local NGO that has experience providing job training to low-income individuals.

Fundacion Calicanto

¶4. (U) Fundacion Calicanto has operated for 15 years in the Casco Antiguo area of Panama City, training persons of limited resources in basic job skills. In its training, Fundacion Calicanto has an integrated approach, so in addition to teaching basic job skills, training includes the development of self-esteem, personal finance management and time management.

¶5. (U) Fundacion Calicanto is eager to open up its training to urban and rural refugees and THP persons, and has plans to tailor its classes to the specific needs of these groups. They plan to add segments on refugee and THP rights and responsibilities to the existing curriculum and will assist job seekers by interfacing with employers to clarify the legal aspects of hiring refugees.

¶6. (U) The local UN High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM) offices support this proposal, and UNHCR has agreed to supplement the proposal with additional travel funds for rural refugees, as detailed in paragraph 10. Fundacion Calicanto's programs are known to Post as excellent and well-run. Fundacion Calicanto has a number of corporate and NGO partners, including the Casco Antiguo Board of Trustees and the Bern Hotel Group.

Training and Associated Costs

¶7. (U) Post proposes to work with UNHCR and IOM to identify 20 refugees and THP persons who would benefit from job training and enroll them in Fundacion Calicanto's courses. We would like to offer courses to 12 refugees living in Panama City's urban environs as well as to 4 refugees and 4 THP persons living in the Darien.

¶8. (U) The courses offered by Fundacion Calicanto and their associated costs are as follows:

Housekeeping assistant: 1,000 USD
Handyman's assistant: 1,000 USD
Electrician's assistant: 900 USD
Welder's assistant: 900 USD

¶9. (U) The cost of the courses include work permit costs, health certification, interview preparation and appropriate certification fees. For example, the housekeeping assistants will receive at completion of their course a "Best Service" certification, allowing them to work for international cruise lines or five star hotels, and those completing the Welder's assistant course will receive an industrial welding certification.

¶10. (U) It is expected that urban refugees in Panama City would live at home and commute to classes. However, the 8 rural refugees and THP persons who live in the remote Darien province will need assistance in obtaining transportation, food and lodging during training. Post proposes allocating the funds remaining after paying tuition for 20 students to supplementing these costs for the 8 individuals coming from the Darien for training. As we do not expect this funding to be sufficient to wholly support these individuals during their stay, UNHCR has agreed to cover any additional expenses for lodging, food and transportation for these individuals.

¶11. (U) For further information, please contact Laurie Younger in Post Panama's Political Section at youngerlk@state.gov.
STEPHENSON